Republicans Vote $5.2 Billion in Cuts

House Panels Focus on Social Spending

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By Dan Morgan
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House Republicans, wielding their budget-cutting axes more forcefully than at any time since taking power, yesterday proposed slashing some $5.2 billion of spending approved by previous Democratic Congresses, including numerous programs benefiting primarily the poor and disadvantaged.

Included in a lengthy list of cuts voted out by five House Appropriations subcommittees during a hectic day of meetings were rural housing loans, nutrition programs for pregnant women and children, spending on urban parks, and assistance to the poor and elderly for protecting their homes against the cold.

To demonstrate that they were not averse to inflicting pain on programs not exclusively for the disadvantaged, Republicans also cut $5 million from the accounts of both the National Endowment for Humanities and National Endowment for the Arts. They also cut the 1996 budget for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting by about 15 percent or $47 million, with deeper cuts planned for the following year.

This early round of spending cuts is politically crucial to Republicans, who have pledged not to add to the deficit. They are struggling to find ways to offset more than $7 billion in additional spending sought by President Clinton to pay for relief from last year's natural disasters, including $5.3 billion in earthquake and flood relief for California.

Without billions in immediate savings, Republicans cannot offset disaster aid costs or pay for proposed tax cuts and deficit-cutting initiatives.

By far the largest reductions came in the form of a $4.2 billion rollback of previously approved spending on programs of the Labor, Education and Health and Human Services depart-

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President Hits GOP As Callous

By Ann Devroy
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President Clinton and congressional Democrats, trying to counter the public relations blitz celebrating the GOP's 50th day of control of Congress, yesterday portrayed Republicans as mean spirited, irresponsible and intent on taking food from the mouths of babies.

In a rare coordination of Democratic message, Clinton traveled to Capitol Hill yesterday, where House Republicans were displaying their "Contract With America" cards and touting their successes at the halfway mark in the 100-day effort to fulfill the contract's campaign pledges.

Zeroing in on what Democrats hope will be a Republican vulnerability—program cuts that look callous and unfair—Clinton hit hard on GOP efforts to repeal the school breakfast, lunch and other nutrition programs for the poor and replace them with block grants. The states could then decide how to spend the dollars.

Accompanied by House Minority Leader Richard A.

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SPENDING, From A1

ments. Many of the programs hit by the cutback fund job-training and education—top investment priorities for Clinton.

Rep. John Edward Porter (R-Ill.), who chairs the subcommittee with jurisdiction over those departments, said: "Almost all programs must contribute something. There are simply too many small programs." As a result, he said, 84 programs will be eliminated.

But Rep. David R. Obey (D-Wis.), ranking member, retorted, "This process is pitiful, to be kind." And he charged that the cuts were being made without any goal in mind other than "as a maybe fund for somebody's capital gains tax." Obey said the proposals would eliminate 125,000 summer jobs this year and deprive 6 million low-income households of heating assistance.

Elsewhere, GOP appropriators began forging an independent course in foreign policy by turning down most of the administration's $402.5 million request for supplemental funds for bilateral aid and U.N. peacekeeping.

Despite a last-minute plea from Secretary of State Warren Christopher, the foreign operations subcommittee provided only $50 million of the $375 million sought for Jordanian debt relief. The subcommittee also turned down the administration's request for an additional $27.2 million for peacekeeping opertions, on grounds that the State Department still had money.

In addition to the cuts made in that subcommittee, the Interior appropriations subcommittee voted reductions of $327 million on National Park Service and other programs under its jurisdiction; $211 million in spending was eliminated by the Energy appropriations subcommittee; and the Agricultural Appropriations subcommittee cut $212 million from its accounts.

Five more subcommittees will go to work today cutting programs under their jurisdiction. All of the cuts must be approved by the full Appropriations Committee before they go to the House.

The cuts apply to funds authorized in previous budgets but not yet spent, and represent only the opening round in what will be far more extensive budget trimming when appropriators turn their attention to future spending later this year.

Democratic appropriators protested throughout the day that the cuts were falling too heavily on the vulnerable.

Rep. Nita M. Lowey (D-N.Y.), suggesting that a $25 million reduction in the Agriculture Department nutrition programs for women and infants would be used in part to offset the costs of earthquake relief, declared: "To pay for that on the backs of women and children is unfair."

In a stark example of differing priorities, GOP appropriators relented on plans to cut $6.5 million earmarked for building a visitors center in Newport, Ore., in the home state of committee member Jim Bunn (R-Ore.).

The project was spared after Bunn proposed other cuts—including $4.8 million from the Energy Department's weatherization assistance program for low-income people.

Committee Democrats strongly opposed turning to the weatherization program, which was already facing a $10 million recision. Rep. David E. Skaggs (D-Colo.) acknowledged that a visitors center was "nice" but said, "I try to think about balancing the equities here."

At one point during the day, House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.), responding to Democratic complaints of inequity, warned that unless the United States put its fiscal house in order, it could end up like a bankrupt Mexico, with wages falling and the working poor the biggest losers.

On the House floor, Republicans pushed through legislation raising defense spending by $3.2 billion. The bill includes $2.5 billion for operations in Haiti, Kuwait, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda and the waters off Cuba plus $670 million for last year's pay raise and other measures to maintain combat readiness.

While Clinton asked for some of the money and Republicans added some on their own, the GOP insisted on offsetting the spending with cuts elsewhere. Their package included reductions totaling $1.4 billion from nondefense programs.

The House approved the bill 262 to 165 and rejected 260 to 167 a Democratic alternative that would have cut it to $2.5 billion only for peacekeeping operations and take the money away only from defense programs.

Clinton Visits Capitol to Rally Democrats In Coordinated Anti-Republican Message

CLINTON, From A1

Gephardt (D-Mo.), Clinton said it would be a "terrible mistake" to end the free meals in schools for poor children. He said one of the things he and the Republicans were hired to do was "stick up for the interests of children" and the nutrition programs had worked in the country.

"An old conservative adage used to be, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it,' " Clinton said of federal nutrition programs after a closed-door session with congressional Democrats that was followed by a news conference on Capitol Hill, not White House, turf.

"Here's a program that isn't broke. It's done a world of good for millions and millions of children, from all races and backgrounds all over the country. And I think it would be a terrible mistake to put an end to it. . . . I hope my party will stand against it."

Said Gephardt: "These cuts are mean spirited, they're wrong, and they won't help our people."

Shortly after Clinton's visit, the White House produced Chief of Staff Leon E. Panetta, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala and Education Secretary Richard W. Riley to build on the case. Panetta said the GOP proposal "would really take food out of the mouths of millions of needy schoolchildren, toddlers, infants and mothers."

Unlike the poor generally, children evoke more public sympathy and support as groups the government needs to protect.

Shalala, criticizing the food and GOP welfare proposals, said Republicans were "weak on work and tough on kids. It reminds me of the hit movie, 'Dumb and Dumber.' "

Republicans reacted with outrage, arguing that the GOP is not taking the food from the mouths of children but giving state officials, who are closer to the needs of their citizens, grants that would allow them to better address the needs of children.

"This is the most outrageous arrogance," said Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour. "Why do these people who live on Pennsylvania Avenue think they care more about the children of Wisconsin than [Republican Gov.] Tommy Thompson does, or than [Florida's Democratic] Governor Lawton Chiles does, or that [Arkansas Democratic Gov.] Jim Guy Tucker does?" He said the idea that Washington cares about the nation's children and will better protect them than local officials "is laughable to anyone who lives outside the Beltway."

The assault on the nutrition programs had the feel of Democratic efforts in the 1980s to portray then-President Ronald Reagan's budgets as heartless and cruel to children and babies, particularly the notable faux pax of having ketchup classified as a vegetable for school lunches as a way to reduce the federal costs of those lunches.

Democrats said Republicans had been successful on "the easy part" of their contract, but said the next phase of the GOP agenda includes proposals that would be far more difficult to pass—cuts in Medicare, student loans as well as the child nutrition programs—and would be fiercely contested by Democrats.

The president said Democrats are beginning to show unity in rallying against Republican initiatives. He cited Democratic efforts to thwart development of a "Star Wars"-like antimissile defense system, a GOP bill to eliminate last year's crime bill commitment to put 100,000 new police officers on the street and now cuts in school nutrition.

Clinton noted Democrats had supported some GOP proposals, such as requiring that Congress comply with labor laws and freeing states from unfunded federal mandates. But the president added: "We have no intention of abandoning the American people to unproven theories and extreme positions. We're the people party. We're going to stick up for people."

Democrats sought to portray the GOP contract as anti-elderly, anti-children and anti-working family, what Gephardt called "the men and women who pack a lunch" every day.

"If this contract were a song," said House Minority Whip David E. Bonior (D-Mich.), "it would be entitled: 'Fifty Ways to Leave the Middle Class.' " He said in the first 50 days of GOP control in Congress there had been 120 votes, but not a single amendment to deal with the need for more jobs, higher wages, improved education, better health care and job training.

Democratic leaders described the president's visit as a kind of pep rally. Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Md.) said Clinton helped Democrats focus on "how extreme the Republican views are and how much work Democrats will have to do" in the next 50 days to get their message out.